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- theSun Tsunami
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- FAQ
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WEB EDITION :: **U!**

**Travel Tip: Carry a big camera**

Emily Tan



**The girl with the bags**

The first thing you notice about Suzanne Lee when you meet her are her bags. Two of them. Backpacks. Big Ones.

One contains her camera equipment - of which she has a considerable amount - and the other has her 17" laptop plus assorted supplies.

"This one's been with me in the desert, on the beach, and in the snow. Plus, it makes an excellent pillow," she says patting her laptop bag fondly as she slings them on her shoulders fluidly with amazon-like ease.

Not that she's built like one; slender and of average (unamazon-like) height, it doesn't seem possible that she's been to 16 countries, served as a team mechanic for Aarows Racing Team, stood in as stuntwoman for Mendam Berahi in Bombay Dramas, and hiked through Pakistan's Thar Desert.

I know what you're thinking (I had the same thought): how on earth did she do all this, and why?

**How it all began**

For Suzanne, the turning point in her life, the moment when she became aware of a big, big world out there accompanied by an undeniable attack of wanderlust, came at the tender age of sweet sixteen.

"I fell into modelling by accident. I was spotted for a KFC TV commercial, then went on to do a Philips ad ... from there I went on to modelling for print and it just kept going.

"I've never been represented by any agency. I obtain my jobs, both modelling and photography, by word-of-mouth. Basically it's friends-telling-friends," she explained.

It was also at 16 that Suzanne started travelling alone, admittedly only to Johor Baru.

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"I just took off one day! It shocked everyone, but lucky for me, I have pretty liberal parents so they didn't ground me.

"It wasn't so much an act of rebellion as a declaration of independence. I just needed to prove to myself that I had it in me to do something like this. And it worked. I felt a lot more confident about myself - both about being alone and travelling alone.

**Modelling - a stepping stone**



For Suzanne, modelling was a means to an end, not the end in itself. While she didn't mind posing for the camera, the real joy for her was in going places and meeting people.

"It's just too passive for me. You don't create, instead you're the tool some other person's using to create his art, or worse, advertisement.

"Having said that, I do enjoy print modelling - photography is a form of art and it allows the model to be creative in interpreting the photographer's intentions," said Suzanne.

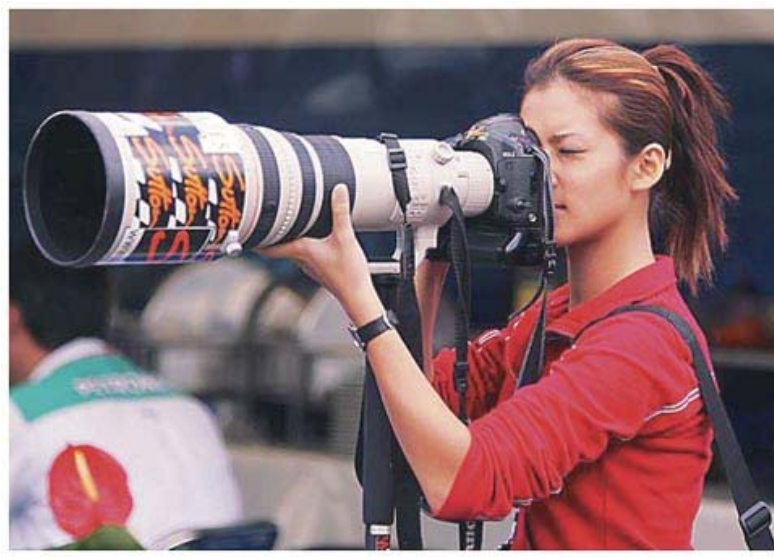
It was modelling that gave her the means and the contacts to launch her career in photography.

"It was mixing around with photographers so much that made me realise how much I

loved the art and the lifestyle.

"I bought my first digital SLR camera for RM3,800 two-and-a-half years ago from the proceeds of a beer photoshoot. With that camera, I took off for four months on a backpacking tour of Europe, and the rest is history!"

**Photography -- her job of choice**



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Today, modelling and numerous other occupations, have definitely taken a backseat to her first love - photography. Travel photography in particular.

"It's very liberating, to go where ever I want and meet whomever I please. I've even been invited to Israel - the one country our Malaysian passport forbids.

"I love meeting people, particularly artists, and I adore beautiful things. Travel photography lets me indulge in an endless variety of these."

One of the questions she's frequently asked after "how do you stay safe?" (check Suzanne's travel tips), is "how do you afford all this travelling?"

"I travel on a budget. You need a great deal of emotional and mental control to travel alone for long periods of time. Emotional because you're on your own and you have to be in control of the situation at all times. Mental control comes into play in expenditure, no matter how much you love a souvenir, a budget is a budget.

"I also do freelance jobs along the way. When I was in Europe for example, I was an unofficial photographer for the Sauber-Petronas F1 Racing Team. I also worked for Sutton Images ([www.sutton-images.com](http://www.sutton-images.com)) UK - the largest independent motorsports imaging company in the world.

"Now I travel on sponsorship. It's an exchange of services - I take photos and they sponsor me the trip," she said with a happy grin.

Apart from her travel-and-shoot trips in Europe and India, another highlight in Suzanne's career was travelling with Ramli Ibrahim's Sutra Dancers as the official photographer on their three-month Spellbound Tour of India 2005.

"It was for this tour that I upgraded my Digital SLR to my current Canon EOS 20D. It takes better quality shots and performs better in the dark.

"This is essential for shooting dancers as you cannot use a flash and most of the performances are dimly lit."

Her current big photography project in the works is the World Peace Project.

"It's such a feel-good job. We get to travel to 150 countries, which is also an attempt to break a Guinness World Record, and photograph world-leaders signing a petition for peace.

"I can't begin to say how great it feels to be able to physically do something for world peace rather than just talking about it."

### Travelling - a passion

After stomping through 16 countries wielding a big camera, Suzanne's favourite countries to travel and shoot in are, without a doubt, India and Switzerland.

"They're such different countries, but so beautiful in their own ways. For India, it's the people, the colour, and the culture. In Switzerland it's the breathtaking scenery," she explained.

It is her love for travel that has temporarily derailed her tertiary education.

"I was enrolled in a degree majoring in photography and I was doing well, but I got the offer to tour India with Ramli Ibrahim's group and I couldn't turn that down. And from there the offers kept flooding in, and I kept taking leave after leave from school.

"Finally I just gave in and put my studies on an indefinite hiatus. I may continue someday, but at the moment I can't help but feel I'm learning more from travelling

and working than I would in university," she laughed.

"The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only a page," said St Augustine, whose long-ago wisdom is echoed by Suzanne's own beliefs.

"I really think Malaysians should travel more. The more countries you visit and the more cultures you're exposed to, the more international and open-minded you become.

"One story I'll never forget was told to me by a Scandinavian backpacker.

"He was on the East-West Indian train stopping at all stations along the way. It was a long train ride - about 20 hours.

"They were at a stop far away from the two nearest towns when the train just broke down. There was no electricity, no lights, and no communication for the passengers.

"It was night and they were in the middle of nowhere, but instead of panicking and getting upset, the passengers just broke out the instruments, food and drink - then partied the night away.

"They were still singing when the train finally started up again, 20 hours later.

"That story taught me that while circumstances may be out of my control, my happiness never is."

### Places Suzanne has been to:



**India** - Madras, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, Bhubaneswar, Puri, Konark, Delhi, Agra, Jaipur, Pushkar, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Udaipur, Bharatpur Keoladeo, Varanasi, Shimla (trekked to Tattapani). McLeod Ganj, Dharmkot, Bhagsu, Dharamsala

**Taiwan** - Kaohsiung for Asian 9Ball Competition

**China** - Shanghai, Hang Zhou

**Hungary** - Budapest for F1 Circuit

**Switzerland** - Lausanne, Zurich, Ticino, St. Gallen, Lucerne, Bern, Jura

**Spain** - Barcelona, Mont Serrat

**France** (north)

**Belgium** - Spa/Francorchamps Circuit

**Germany** - Drive through from Switzerland to Amsterdam

**Netherlands** - Amsterdam & Haarlem

**Italy** - Milano

**England** - Northampton, Milton Keynes, London, Silverstone Circuit

**Indonesia** - Yogyakarta-candi Borobudur, Bali

**Thailand**

**Singapore**

And of course,

**Malaysia** (Borneo & Peninsular Islands, National Parks, Hills, etc.)

### Backpacking tips

#### 1. Blend in

Whenever possible, dress in the native costume so as not stand out as a target. Be sure you conform to local dress customs.

#### 2. If you're a woman, pretendt you're married

In Europe and African countries, wear a gold wedding band on you ring finger. When I travelled in India, I wore a bindi and lots of red bangles which made it seem like I was newly married.

### **3. Don't go out at night**

Stay in your room at night and get some sleep. You don't want to get caught up in the nightlife if you're on your own.

### **4. If you don't peel it or cook it, leave it**

When backpacking through the poorer regions of countries like India, don't eat anything you don't prepare yourself, and don't drink or use any water that isn't bottled, or that you haven't filtered and boiled yourself. Going hungry beats food poisoning.

### **5. Carry a big camera**

When I was in a remote and poorer section of India, I was harassed by a bunch of teenage boys. I whipped out my camera with its 300mm lens and chased them with it. Oh yeah, the camera's good for taking great shots too.

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